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BOOK REVIEWS

Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia. By BALDWIN SPENCER. With illustrations. London, Macmillan & Co., 1914. pp. xx, 516.

A classic does not repeat itself; and we shall not thrill again as we thrilled to the story of the Arunta. They, alas! are "decimated in numbers and hopelessly degenerate in customs;" indeed, "there are very few parts of Australia now left in which it is possible to study the aboriginal in his natural state." All the more do we owe gratitude to Professor Spencer for this third contribution to Australian anthropology.

The present work is mainly concerned with the natives of Bathurst and Melville Islands, and with the tribes of the Kakadu nation, inhabiting the Coburg peninsula and the district drained by the Alligator Rivers, some hundred odd miles east of Port Darwin. From the Islands comes an account of burial and mourning ceremonies, the most elaborate on record. They are "interesting because they differ so completely from any on the northern mainland and seem to point to the fact that the island natives have either developed these ceremonies among themselves or have derived them from some other people with whom they, but, apparently, not the natives of the mainland, have come in contact." In most respects the islanders are closely allied to the mainland tribes, so that "the existence of these remarkable burial and mourning ceremonies on the two islands is very difficult to understand." Space may be spared for a single detail: the women carry, besides discs and armlets, highly decorated rings (flat discs with the central portion cut out), some of them as much as 15 in. in diameter,—curiously suggestive, therefore, of the wreaths of civilization; and "the whole color-scheme and design of these armlets, discs and rings [which are shown in color] is quite distinct from anything met with on the continent." The Kakadu and allied tribes add to our knowledge of initiation ceremonies, especially by way of a final ceremony known as Muraian, with which is associated the use of a curious array of sticks and stones connected with totemic animals and plants.

These instruments are instructive, as representing a possible stage on the way from copy to convention: "it is well known how copies, taken in succession, one after the other, of an original drawing, become so modified in the course of a relatively small series, that the last bears no resemblance to the original; . . . it is possible that the Muraian objects show us a series that have not as yet become completely conventionalized but are on their way to this."

We recognize the heel of Achilles in the tale of a man "who had not been completely red-ochred. There was just one spot on his foot which had been left untouched, and here . . . a snake had bitten him, . . . in proof whereof he showed me the scar." Our attention is caught, again, by the plate of pot-hole-like depressions in a rock surface, that are "clearly of human manufacture," and yet unlike anything found anywhere else in Australia; "they seem

to be the work of a people inhabiting the country before the present natives came." Finally, mention may be made of the plates of rock and bark drawings (men, animals, and mythical beings or Mormo) included in the chapter on Decorative Art.

Professor Spencer laments that he has lost the cooperation of Mr. Gillen, to whose memory he dedicates, the book. Mr. Gillen's death was, it is true, a serious blow to anthropological science; but the surviving author has well maintained the standard of the two previous works. The chapters deal, in what is now familiar fashion, with social organization, marriage and initiation; totem groups and ceremonial objects; burial and mourning ceremonies, magic and medicine; customs, beliefs, traditions; food restrictions; weapons, clothing, implements and art. An appendix contains vocabularies and language notes. There are 92 photographic reproductions, beside text-diagrams and maps; and there are 36 plates, of which eight are in color.

E. B. T.

The Khasis. By P. R. T. GURDON. With an introduction by Sir C. LYALL. Second ed., illustrated. London, Macmillan & Co., 1914. pp. xxiv, 232.

The Khasis inhabit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, an Assamese district of some 6,000 square miles whose capital is Shillong. They are isolated among an encircling population of Tibeto-Burman stock; and who they precisely are, and where they came from, are still unsettled questions. Their nearest affinity is to the Mon people of Further India, and they may have moved into Assam from the south-east, linguistic evidence is accumulating, but general anthropological data are still to seek.

The Khasis present three distinctive features which recommend them to the anthropologist. "In the first place, their social organization presents one of the most perfect examples still surviving of matriarchal institutions." Secondly, they possess remarkable methods "of divination for ascertaining the causes of misfortune and the remedies to be supplied. . . . It is somewhat surprising to find among them the identical method of *extispicium* which was in use among the Romans, as well as an analogous development in the shape of egg-breaking . . . which seems to have been known to diviners in ancient Hellas." Thirdly, they have "the custom, which prevails to this day, of setting up great memorials of rough stone, of the same style and character as the *menhirs* and *cromlechs* which are found in Western Europe, Northern Africa, and Western Asia." All these things are set forth, with ample illustration and in full detail, by Colonel Gurdon, under the headings of General Description, Domestic Life, Laws and Customs, Religion, Folk-lore (typical folktales, in translation and in the original, are given). Miscellaneous (naming of parents from children; method of calculating time; characters and customs of the Lynggams), and Language. Three appendices deal with the exogamous clans of the Cherra and Khyrim states, and with divination by egg-breaking.

The work was first published, as a government monograph, in 1907. It has now been brought up to date, especially upon the side of language, furnished with a bibliography, and illustrated by ten colored plates from water-color drawings. The book further contains a map, and a number of photographic reproductions. It is a member of the series which contains Colonel Shakespear's monograph on the Lushei Kuki Clans (this JOURNAL, xxiv., 287).